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SOME NOTES OF THE BIRDS OF ROCK CANYON, ARIZONA.

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(With Photographs by the Writer and J. D. Figgins.)

The biological interest attached to the Sonoran life zones, and particularly to the Lower, is readily attested by the number of papers and more lengthy publications treating of these regions.

But despite all that has been written, interest in these wonderful areas is not flagging, nor has the subject been at all exhausted. In fact, in common with many other regions, they have just been surveyed, and the work now before the field and cabinet biologist may be confidently expected to materially enlarge our knowledge of their flora and fauna. Species will be added or eliminated; others discovered as entirely new to science; ranges will be extended; migrations, with schedules of arrivals and departures and other movements of a consequential character be determined; and above all, causes definitely ascertained for the existence or non-existence of the many characteristic forms.

It was accordingly with much pleasurable anticipation that the writer, accompanied by Messrs J. D. Figgins and A. H. Burns, pitched camp at the mouth of Rock Creek Canyon, on the south side of the Santa Catalina Mountains, under large palo verdes and mesquites on the afternoon of May 7th, 1916, where we were delighted to find ourselves surrounded by con-

ditions ideal beyond our most sanguine hopes. In fact, judging from the results obtained in the vicinity, we concluded it to be the most important, from an ornithological viewpoint, of any for many miles in every direction, due solely to the presence of permanent water with the accompanying luxuriant desert vegetation.

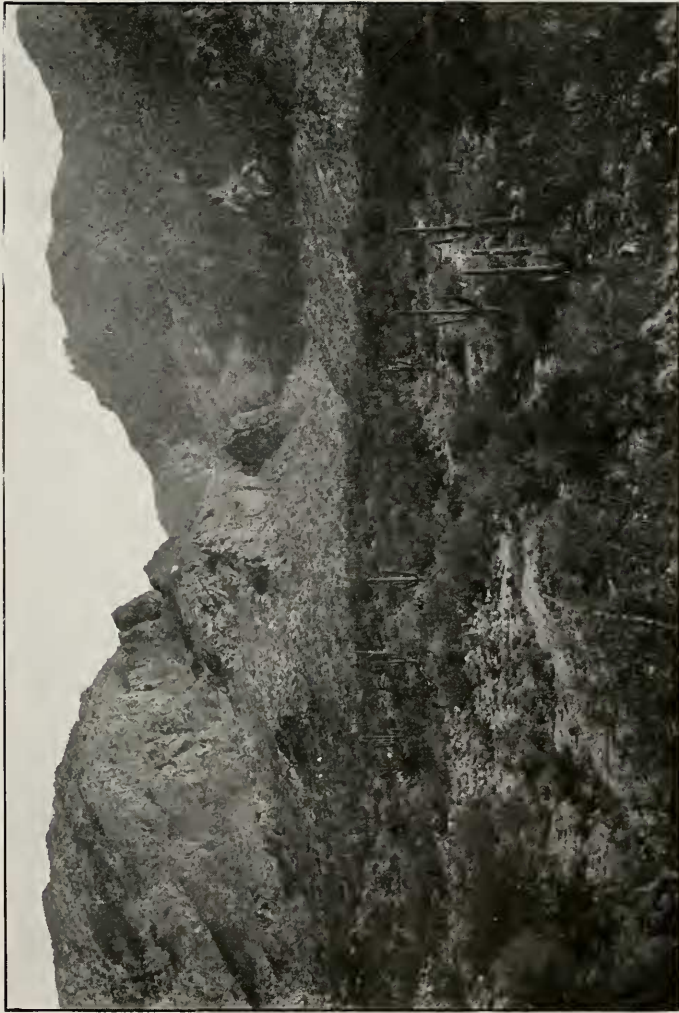
The portion of Rock Creek upon which we were located, had its source (at this season) but a scant hundred yards above our camp, disappearing into the thirsty sands about the same distance below; at both places forming large water-holes supporting small clumps of medium-sized cottonwoods, which, during all daylight hours, were literally alive with a great variety of birds. It was in the vicinity of these two sources of water supply with the intervening territory, that the great bulk of our observations were made, the extraordinary abundance of bird-life between and at these points rendering their pursuit useless in the less likely desert regions; though, of course, the latter were carefully studied as well.

In the neighborhood of the water-holes the creek banks rose abruptly; on the west with an almost impenetrable thicket of thorn-bush and mesquite fringing a rugged plain, where the higher growths of deciduous plants fell rapidly away to barren flats of creosote-bush (*Covillea*), cholla (*Opuntia cholla*), and tree cactus (*O. versicolor*), with the beautiful giant cactus or "Sahuaro" (*Cereus giganteus*), either as solitary trunks or gracefully branched like some giant candelabra. This plain stretched clear for twenty-five or thirty miles, broken only by a few rolling hills and the narrow thread of cottonwoods that marked the course of the (now dry) Santa Rita River.

To the east the bank rose sharply to a high stony ridge, rough, hot, and cheerless; covered with masses of the multi-spined cholla, straggling growths of palo verde (*Parkinsonia*) and the ever-present sahuaros. Still on to the east and north rose the beautifully modeled Santa Catalina Mountains, bearing near their summits, heavy growths of cedar



We "pitched camp . . . under large palo verdes and mesquites"
Photo by F. C. Lincoln



“At the mouth of Rock Creek Canyon, on the south side of the Santa Catalina Mountains”

Photo by J. D. Figgins

and yellow pine, which did much toward softening the dry harshness of the desert below.

The flower season had passed its zenith at the time of our visit, but enough maroon and mahogany-colored flowers remained on the tree cactus, with some big, lemon-yellow blooms on the prickly-pear, to afford an idea of the gorgeousness of the landscape but a short time before. The flowers of the giant cactus were just appearing; the white, waxy clusters forming a crown around the apex of each trunk and arm. We were also fortunate in finding two barrel cacti (*Echinocactus*) in bloom, with flowers of rich burnt-orange color, splashed and mottled with red. The candle-bush, too, (*Fouquieria*) had dropped most of its odd flame-like vermilion spikes and was beginning to send tiny ovate leaves out over each spine. But the palo verde and mesquite were still in full bloom, resembling nothing so much as green and yellow cumulus clouds in the distance, and from the numbers of bees that frequented them it was evident that a supply of sweets was stored in these stern denizens of the waste places. Agaves or century-plants, with a few thread-and-needle plants were found on the rocky slopes and taluses farther up the canyon.

By the last of May the heat was felt severely by our temperately accustomed skins, and contrary to all expectations, we did not find the air exceptionally dry, and we perspired freely. Despite the noon-day heat, however, the nights and mornings were always sufficiently cool to render the use of sweaters a matter of satisfaction, and we slept between heavy blankets with comfort.

The month's work netted a collection of about 225 specimens, representing 52 species and subspecies, which, with observations on 13 others not collected, brought the list up to 65.

The following constitutes the list, with annotations:

Ardea h. herodias—Great Blue Heron. One example was noted at a small water-hole on the Santa Rita May 27th, and again on June 1st.

Oxyechus vociferus—Killdeer. One noted on the Santa Rita May 27th.

Lophortyx gambeli—Gambel's Quail. Plentiful, particularly in the vicinity of the water-holes on Rock Creek. A brood of newly hatched young (still damp) was secured on the 24th of May, while other broods of all ages were of daily note. A set of heavily incubated eggs found on the 26th. Their call-note has a decidedly sarcastic tone and is not infrequently given from the top of a mesquite or palo verde, 20 or 25 feet from the ground.

Zenaidura m. marginella—Western Mourning Dove. Common, but not seen in as great numbers as *Melopelia*. Very wild. Nest with quarter grown young found May 20th.

Scardafella inca—Inca Dove. Not found in the desert country at all, but very common in the city of Tucson, particularly on the University campus, where specimens were secured. During the heat of the day it was of common note to see from a pair to six or eight close together on a single limb. They are almost domesticated, and in the neighborhood of poultry yards are considered somewhat of a nuisance.

Melopelia a. mearnsi—Western White-winged Dove. Abundant. Frequents the mesquite and cactus-covered foothills, the sahuaros forming their favorite perches. In the evening the calling of the males was incessant, and being quite variable in length and tone, many phrases were readily adaptable. One that could always be counted upon to rouse the ire of the cook at our evening mealtime was, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you?" Not infrequently supper was temporarily forgotten by the exasperated culinary artist, who took gun and proceeded to collect the insinuating pigeon.

They feed largely on the berries of the thorn-bush and insects secured from the sahuaros.

The season opens June 1st, much too early, as we found nests containing both eggs and young at a still later date.

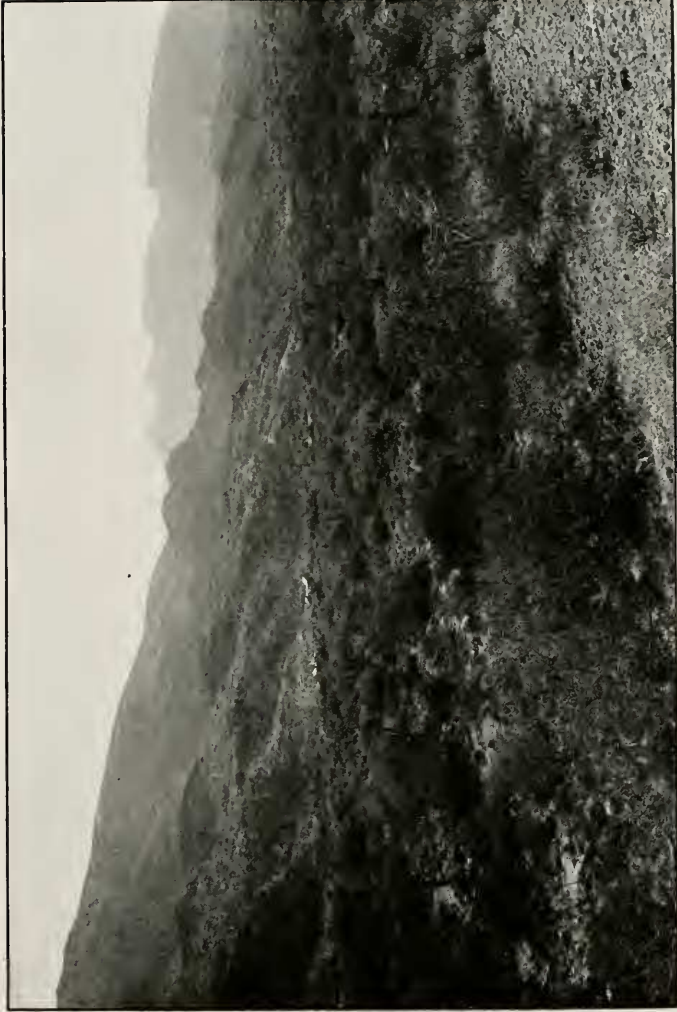
Cathartes a. septentrionalis—Turkey Vulture. Common. Five or six seen daily around the mouth of the canyon.

Buteo b. calurus—Western Red-tail. An adult or two seen daily and our camp neighbor, Mr. Harold Bell Wright, had an immature he had captured nearby, for a pet. This bird became very tame and would make no demonstration at being approached.

Urubitinga anthracina—Mexican Black Hawk. Rare. I saw one on two occasions on May 24th, but failed to secure it with the light load in my collecting gun. On second observation it was associated with the Vultures.

Aquila chrysaetos—Golden Eagle. Rare; two seen on the banks of the Santa Rita June 1st.

Falco s. phalaena—Desert Sparrow Hawk. Rare. An occasional



“Fringing a rugged plain.” Mesquite and cactus flats at the base of the foothills
Photo by J. D. Figgins